



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
AND WORK SCIENCE

Nordic Perspectives on Transnational Trade Union Cooperation in Europe – Summary and Conclusions

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Summary and conclusions

This report is a sub-study of a research project on transnational trade union cooperation and networking at the sectoral level in Europe.¹ The overall aim is to explain the factors that appear to enable or hamper this cooperation. The report is specifically focused on how collaboration works and how it is perceived from Nordic trade union perspectives. The research questions to be answered were the following:

- How do transnational trade union cooperation structures appear from Nordic trade union perspectives? Which levels, purposes, and activities do Nordic trade unions consider most important in this cooperation?
- What trade unions in other countries do unions in the metals, construction, transportation, banking and finance, and healthcare sectors in the Nordic countries cooperate with? In and through what forums do they cooperate? What are their experiences concerning this cooperation?
- What issues do Nordic trade unions in these sectors cooperate on, and what difficulties do they experience? What are their views on the future development of this cooperation on various issues?
- What are, according to trade unions in the Nordic countries, the most important preconditions and obstacles to transnational trade union cooperation in general, and in their respective sectors?

The analyses are based on three empirical sources. First, data has been taken from a survey from a previous research project 2010-11 with respondents from 250 European

¹ The project was funded by the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond). The authors would like to thank the respondents, Bengt Furåker, Patrik Vulkan, and the participants at the seminar at the University of Gothenburg at which the manuscript was presented and reviewed.

trade unions (cf. Larsson 2012, 2015; Larsson et al. 2015; Lovén Seldén 2014). Second, we used data from a survey conducted in 2015-16 with respondents from 117 trade unions organizing within five sectors (metals, transportation, construction, banking and finance, and healthcare) in the five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden). The overall response rate was 62% (n=73). Third, we did eight interviews with a total of 11 centrally placed representatives from seven Swedish and one joint Nordic trade union.

We will begin this summary and conclusion by summarizing the main findings theme by theme in relation to the research questions, and discuss whether our results confirm or contradict previous research. Thereafter, we will discuss the results in connection to the overall theoretical approach on which the project is based: first, the extent to which countries and regime differences in industrial relations play a role in trade union cooperation (cf. Hyman 2001; Visser et al. 2009); second, the importance of sectoral differences and sectoral regimes for variations in trade union cooperation (cf. Bechter et al. 2011, 2012; Bechter & Brandl 2015b; Erne 2008; Howell & Givan 2011); and third, what conclusions can be drawn from network and organizational perspectives on union cooperation (cf. Nordin 2009; Pulignano 2009; Traxler et al. 2008).

Levels, aims, and activities in trade union cooperation

The first question concerned the overall cooperation structure, and the levels, aims, and activities that exist and are emphasized among Nordic unions. After an initial overview of the structure and complexity of cooperation, we analyzed those levels of union cooperation that Nordic affiliates deem important, and with which countries they share interests. The former question concerns the extent to which unions within the five sectors perceive a change during the last decade regarding the importance of cooperation through the national peak level organizations, European trade union federations (ETUFs), the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). The most significant result is that the European trade union federations (ETUFs) have continuously increased in importance over the last

decade, confirming findings dating from the previous decade (Nergaard & Dølvik 2005: 53ff.).

This result was explained partly as being in line with the increased importance that the European Commission has given the sectoral level in the social dialogue since the beginning of the century. However, it is also explained by the fact that we surveyed sectoral trade unions. Quite naturally, union representatives view the sectoral level as more important than the work being undertaken on the confederation level, since the former handles issues more closely related to their members' interests. Nonetheless, another result was not that self-evident, and strengthens our conclusion that the European sector level has become more important in trade union work and cooperation: A majority of representatives of the trade unions in these five sectors stated that it is currently more important to work with affiliates within the sector in other countries than with unions in other sectors within their home country.

The above result can be made somewhat more specific by looking more closely at which activities and issues the unions actually cooperate on. Regarding activities such as exchanging information on collective bargaining or writing common positions, cooperation with other unions in Europe is almost as strong as cooperation on the national level, and a majority of the unions are engaged in such activities. Even in some of the less frequent activities, such as joint training programs for union representatives, participation in demonstrations, or exchange of observers in collective bargaining, the collaboration across national boundaries is almost as well-developed as that within the national arena. However, there are two key areas in which the national arena is still dominant – coordination of collective bargaining, and union action such as strikes, overtime blockades, and boycotts. Even though the level of cooperation remains strongest on the national arena, our findings confirm previous research showing the increasing role of transnational cooperation at the sectoral level (Nergaard & Dølvik 2005: 53ff.), and there is a fairly broad set of transnational cooperation activities in which trade unions from the Nordic countries take part.

As for the two levels of European cooperation, the analysis of the interviews confirms that cooperation at the sectoral level is seen as more important than cooperation at the cross-sectoral level. Sectoral trade unions perceive the work done in

the ETUC and the cross-sectoral sectoral social dialogue as too general and abstract to be of direct benefit or value, but also as being too close to the Commission's agenda and interests. Their own sector dialogues, however, are perceived as very important, even though not always leading to strong results, and from time to time are hampered by a lack of true engagement from employer organizations. The main thing, according to our respondents, is to keep this dialogue going in order to enable mutual understanding and positive negotiations in the future.

The survey showed that the sectoral social dialogues are considered important in each of their three functions: to influence EU policies, to strengthen and coordinate cooperation among the unions, and to negotiate with European employer organizations. Still, relatively few unions believe that the outcome has had any greater significance for the working conditions of their members. Some unions even think that their sectoral dialogue requires too many resources to be worthwhile. This stance was particularly prevalent in the healthcare sector, while it was very rare in the metal sector.

There is a strong homogeneity among sectors and countries in the Nordic region regarding the activities they cooperate on with trade unions in other countries. The most obvious exception is Iceland, which has a somewhat lower degree of transnational trade union cooperation as compared the other Nordic countries. We have not found any significant difference among the sectors with regard to loosely held activities organized within the framework of the Nordic and European sector associations, such as exchanging information on collective bargaining and writing joint positions. However, it is apparent that the metal and construction sectors pursue particularly high degrees of transnational cooperation on more advanced activities: educating union representatives, coordinating collective bargaining, and organizing demonstrations. The two service sectors (banking and finance, and healthcare) generally have lower degrees of transnational cooperation on such activities. This outcome seems to strengthen the theory that sectoral differences play a more significant role than national differences – at least in the Nordic countries, with the possible exception of Iceland.

Communities of interest, partners, and forums

The survey, supported by the interviews, confirms previous research showing that Nordic unions share more interests with unions in the Nordic countries than with unions in other European countries and regions, particularly those outside of the EU (Nergaard & Dølvik 2005: 64ff.). Nordic unions share a highly developed regional cooperation. They have strong joint Nordic meta-organizations and also good bilateral relations, which creates a basis for dense albeit relatively loose information and coordination networks. A particular characteristic of the Nordic cooperation is therefore its high internal coordination, as compared with other regions in Europe. There are of course loose bilateral and multilateral communication and coordination networks, through which unions exchange information to use at the national level, in many regions in Europe. There are also regional cooperation networks in other regions in Europe, but as far as we know, it is primarily the Nordic countries that have developed these into joint formal and staffed meta-organizations at both the sectoral and cross-sectoral levels.²

Through their relatively strong cultural community and similarities in trade union traditions and joint organizations, Nordic trade unions have built a strong basis of trust, which allows unions a rapid response from each other when needed – for example, to obtain information or support through solidarity action. Additionally, the strong Nordic coordination makes them well-prepared for meetings in the European trade union federations (ETUFs), in which they often speak with one voice. It was even suggested in our interviews that the Nordic approach can be a bit too well-voiced, which can lead to skepticism from trade unions from other countries. However, some interviewees also emphasized that they have tried to downplay this tendency somewhat.

As regards bilateral contacts outside the Nordic region, primarily German and secondarily British unions appear as the most significant partners, and the German and

² At the cross-sectoral level, there is Nordic Trade Union Cooperation (NFS); at the sectoral level in the five sectors studied, there are the Industrial Employees in the Nordic region (IN), the Nordic Building and Woodworkers' Federation (NFBWW), the Nordic Transport Workers' Federation (NTF), Nordic Bank, Finance and Insurance Unions (NFU), and the Nordic Public Employees Trade Unions (NOFS).

British unions are also perceived as being particularly strong in the European arena. However, in this regard there is a difference among the unions in the less competitive healthcare sector and unions in sectors under stronger competitive pressures. While the former seems to have slightly fewer strong bilateral European connections, trade unions in the construction and particularly the metal sector have far more contacts beyond Germany and the UK. These are mainly in what the respondents perceive as the “core countries” in Europe, such as France, Spain, Belgium, and the Netherlands; however, Austria and Ukraine are also mentioned. Regarding national differences, the findings reinforce the idea of the Nordic countries as a coherent regime: We could not find any strong differences in networking and bilateral cooperation among the Nordic countries, although there are some minor variations. The Icelandic unions seem to lag somewhat behind the other Nordic countries in terms of having European bilateral partners outside the Nordic region. In addition, the Swedish unions appeared to be slightly stronger than the others in this regard.

A rather exceptional part of the Nordic trade unions’ network involves their relations with trade unions in the Baltic countries. The reason is that this relationship is strongly unilateral, consisting of targeted support given from Nordic to Baltic unions. This asymmetric cooperation has a long and strong tradition, but at the same time, there exists a certain resignation among the respondents concerning the development in the Baltic countries. It is said to be very slow, and the work yields quite a meager result in terms of member recruitment and organization in that region. Overall, the difference in the trade unions’ bilateral relations with “core countries” and the Baltic states respectively, shows the importance of organizational capacities among partners in cooperation; with weak partners, the relationship becomes asymmetrical and unidirectional in the flow of information and resources, and thereby less useful, as compared to the cooperation with well-organized unions in the “core” countries.

Difficulties and obstacles in cooperation

Even if there is a strong willingness in Nordic unions to cooperate across national

borders – and they are already cooperating to a great extent – there are also difficulties and obstacles. The surveys discussed in the results section provide a relatively uniform and rich result, which is also verified and elaborated through the analysis of the interviews (cf. Larsson 2012). One of the main obstacles to union cooperation is the lack of financial and organizational resources. This may possibly seem surprising, given that the Nordic unions have high membership rates and are relatively resource-rich compared with unions in many other countries in Europe. However, transnational trade union cooperation requires great resources, and accordingly competes with other union priorities.

The scarcity of resources also influences which issues and activities are prioritized. It is clear from the interviews that it is not always easy to obtain consensus from the members in favor of transnational cooperation, which does not always seem to produce value for money in a direct way. Moreover, it is not only a question of how many resources a union has, but also how many resources their cooperative partners have. In order to achieve effective cooperation, unions in other countries must also have the time and money to participate. The lack of resources in other countries, especially in Eastern Europe, is therefore another important part of the resource obstacles that are said to hamper transnational trade union cooperation in Europe.

Another important type of barrier in both surveys and interviews relates to differences in how unions organize and differences in industrial relations among countries and regimes. Unions in different countries have different principles for organizing members, and as a result aggregate interests in different ways. When big unions organizing members cross-sectorally encounter small unions organizing members in only one of the many professions within a sector (or in only a single company), there are imbalances in strength and interest representation. When the Nordic unions meet with unions that are weaker or have very different principles of organization – or when there are no actual unions in their sector – there are difficulties in finding a partner or specific representatives with whom to cooperate.

These problems are further complicated by differences in industrial relations among countries (cf. European Commission, 2009, 2011; Visser, 2013). Nordic trade unions feel that the understanding and common interests they use as a base for Nordic cooper-

ation is missing on the European arena, and they even find that the Nordic way “collides” with other countries’ systems of industrial relations: Issues such as how to approach collective bargaining, how to think about minimum wages, the role of the government in industrial relations, and relationships with employers cause problems when unions operating in relatively diverse institutional contexts try to cooperate.

In addition, there are obstacles in that employer organizations’ interest in dialogue, or negotiating on the European level, does not always correspond to the ambitions of trade unions. As indicated in previous research, some sectors may lack employer organizations that are willing to negotiate, whereas others have problems with employer organizations competing amongst themselves (cf. Branch 2005; Dufresne 2006; Keller & Weber 2011; Welz 2008). Furthermore, in some sectors the employers’ organizations have a different sectoral demarcation as compared to the unions (cf. Léonard et al. 2012). An example is the healthcare sector, in which employer organizations exclusively representing hospitals encounter trade unions representing staff both within and outside the hospital setting.

Finally, both the surveys and the interviews confirm that there are linguistic, cultural, and political-ideological obstacles that impede transnational trade union cooperation. Even though these obstacles are not as important as those discussed above, they are by no means insignificant, since they reduce understanding and generate tension among unions. Even though there are hopes among our Nordic respondents that English will eventually become a viable working language, such is not the case today. The explanations given are that many representatives belong to an older generation with insufficient English skills, and that certain regions exhibit a cultural prestige and unwillingness to switch over to English.

The problem of language diversity is not only connected to problems of understanding, but is also linked to the resource limitations, since interpreters and translations are costly. In addition, language barriers complicate the informal everyday communication that enables the development of common understanding and trust (cf. Kay 2005).

Trust and understanding are undermined also by the different cultural practices that make representatives from different countries relate differently regarding even simple

things such as when to show up at meetings, how to communicate at the meetings, and how to make decisions. These things may seem like minutiae, but the analysis shows that they can have significant implications on how joint decisions are perceived and implemented. Furthermore, there are great and quite profound divergences in political-ideological views influencing the approaches of different trade unions. Among the Nordic unions, this is perceived as a problem since their consensus, partnership, and compromise orientation in relation to employer organization is being questioned from elsewhere in Europe, by unions having a more conflict-oriented and activist tradition. Because of this, trade unions have difficulties in finding common reference points, and from the Nordic perspective, this also undermines the dialogue with the employers' organizations and the possibility to influence EU institutions.

The content and future of cooperation

If the above theme focused primarily on the similarities among the five sectors, it is apparent that the differences are in the limelight when the content or issues – and the views on future cooperation – are analyzed. It is after all in these matters we come closest to the particulars pertaining to the members' immediate interests and the prevailing conditions in each sector.

The interviews show that trade unions have relatively limited expectations of what can be achieved in the social dialogue at the sectoral level, as well as in other forms of cooperation. At the same time, they emphasize that in order to have good relations when needed, it is important to maintain dialogue and discussion with trade union colleagues in Europe and with employers at the EU level. From that perspective, cooperation encompasses listening to and creating good contacts with many actors early on in the decision-making processes. The quest for consensus in the ETUFs is in some cases a hindrance to profound discussions, since member organizations are reluctant to go into direct conflict with each other. Some of the respondents state that they actually end the discussion when their views differ too much. At least that is the case if you have heavy counterparts, such as German trade unions. According to some of the respondents, there

is also not much lobbying going on through their ETUF in what they regard as the key issues.

What are the key issues for cooperation then? One area discussed in all the interviews is *work environment*, both physical and psychosocial. *Gender equality* also appears to be the subject of some cooperation or discussion, but with very different outcomes. *Privatization* and *liberalization* are also recurring themes in both service and production sectors. In the metal sector, the TTIP negotiations are a point of reference in this issue, while ongoing and proposed liberalization of other EU regulatory frameworks are the basis of these discussions in the other four sectors. Table 1 below gives an overview of the differentiators for each sector regarding cooperation, content, and direction, in addition to the joint themes enumerated above.

Table 1. Focus, expectations and changes in transnational trade union cooperation

Sector	Focus/content	Expectations	Change in cooperation
<i>Metals</i>	Industrial policies -TTIP -REFIT Economic policies	Modest	Broadened cooperation, from EMF to IndustriALL
<i>Banking and finance</i>	Legislation Financial market regulation and EU regulations	Low/modest	Change of course: delegation from member organization to NFU
<i>Healthcare</i>	Professional issues -Sharp objects/injuries -Validation -Exams Economic policy/privatization	Modest	Broadened cooperation within EPSU
<i>Construction</i>	Wage dumping Free movement Social dimension	Low	Change of course: more cooperation and best practice after Laval
<i>Transportation</i>	Wage dumping Cabotage/privatization	Quite high	Broadened cooperation within ETF

For the metal sector, it is possible to draw parallels between the kind of trade union activity carried out within the nation-state and that at the European level. Still, industrial policy is an obvious focus in both arenas. In this sector, we also find the most far-reaching attempts at cross-border coordination of negotiations and agreements over time.

In the banking and finance sector, cooperation is increasingly focused on trying to influence EU policy through direct Nordic lobbying on decision-makers. The encompassing reregulation of financial markets in the wake of the financial crisis has been the subject of a lot of advocacy work from trade unions. The Nordic federations are important in all of the sectors studied, but in the financial sector there has been a transfer of power from national trade unions to their Nordic association, NFU. Theoretically, this can be interpreted as an increase in a technocratic “logic of influence” from previous prevailing democratically oriented “logic of membership” (Schmitter & Streeck 1999; Dølvik 1997; Erne 2008: 21ff. Erne 2012).

The focus in the healthcare sector is somewhat different. There, European trade union work is concentrated mostly on sector-specific vocational and professional issues, such as staffing and patient safety.

In both the construction and transportation sectors, the issues of social dumping and wage dumping are high on the political agenda. The respondents from these sectors talk about the importance of preserving the Swedish model.

Of interest is not only which issues the unions cooperate on, but also the issues that are most difficult for them to cooperate on, since that says something about the boundaries of future cooperation. Wages and collective bargaining are such issues, even though there are special committees for cooperation on these issues within the ETUC and the ETUFs. Other issues that the Nordics identified as lower in priority for cooperation are organizing and recruitment of new members. Even though organizing has been given a more important place in the trade union movement in Europe, the actual recruitment of members is still seen mainly as a matter for the individual affiliated unions. For example, the ETUC decided at the congress of 2015 to work more actively on this issue, but primarily through so-called “best practice.”

When examining the content of cooperation, differences and difficulties in cooperating come to the foreground. That is not surprising, considering the great differences that exist in Europe regarding wage regulation and bargaining, such as whether salaries are determined by individual bargaining, collective agreements, or legislation. A relatively clear dividing line runs between trade unions with high and low degrees of organization, particularly since trade unions with high density also tend to have more resources in general. Put differently, unions' ability or inability to bargain collective agreements are key factors for understanding their attitudes toward cooperation in issues connected to collective bargaining and wage policies.

Added to this is the dividing line between competitive and less competitive sectors, and goods and services production (Bechter et al. 2012). Cooperation in the metal sector, and manufacturing in general, seems to be both broader and deeper than in other sectors. Previous research on Nordic union cooperation has suggested that competitive sectors have more extensive international activities, putting the manufacturing industry at the forefront of developed cooperation, followed by the construction and transportation sectors, whereas more domestic and "sheltered" sectors such as healthcare and certain professions have established somewhat weaker cooperative structures (Larsson et al. 2012).

At the same time, sectoral differences must not be over-exaggerated. As mentioned above, liberalization and privatization issues are also current in the healthcare sector, which has traditionally not been an internationally competitive one. If the question is stated in terms of *how* trade unions cooperate – rather than *what* they cooperate on – we find strong similarities among the sectors, as discussed above. In addition, *how effective* this cooperation is, is yet another issue, which cannot be answered by these analyses.

Concluding reflections

To conclude, we will reconnect to the overall theoretical approaches on which the project is based: the extent to which countries and regime differences in industrial relations play a role in trade union cooperation; the importance of sector differences and

sectoral regimes; and the conclusions that can be drawn from the construction of the network and organizational perspective on union cooperation (cf. Nordin 2009; Pulignano 2009; Traxler et al. 2008).

One of the starting points of the project was the theoretical discussion regarding whether comparative research on industrial relations should take as its point of departure national and regional variations in trade union traditions and industrial relations (cf. Hyman 2001; Visser et al. 2009), or if differences among sectors and “sector regimes” are a more relevant basis for comparative research (Bechter et al. 2011, 2012, Bechter & Brandl 2015b; Erne 2008; Howell & Givan 2011). The approach we have chosen in this project is to test both comparison points, to see what significance they have for the Nordic unions’ approach to transnational cooperation in Europe: in what venues do trade unions operate, what partners do they have, what strategies do they develop, and on what issues do they collaborate?

The main finding of this study is that sectoral differences are more important than differences among countries in the Nordic region. However, two caveats need to be raised in relation to the interpretation of the results before we go into details. First, the results are connected to our choice to study trade unions on the sectoral level, and to select sectors that may be suspected to have quite different contextual determinants. Second, the results are influenced by the choice to focus only on trade unions in the Nordic countries in this study. Therefore, we do not know if this result means that the sectoral differences play a larger role throughout Europe than national differences, as this result may be attributed to the fact that the Nordic countries constitute a distinct regime with only small internal variations among them. That question we cannot be answered until the entire project is completed. However, one thing actually indicates that national and regional differences play a major role in the European arena: the big obstacles to European trade union cooperation that Nordic unions find in differences in legislation and policy, as well as in language, culture, and ideology between unions in different countries (cf. Larsson 2012). Previous research also shows that there are clear effects of such “regime differences” on other aspects of trade union strategies and approaches (Busemeyer et al. 2008; Glassner & Vandaele 2012; Furåker & Bengtsson 2013; Furåker & Lovén Seldén 2013, 2015; Larsson 2014, 2015; Mitchell 2007).

Previous research has demonstrated that the Nordic countries constitute the regime of industrial relations that is the most homogeneous internally in Europe (Bechter et al. 2011, 2012). Against this background, it is perhaps not surprising that we find greater differences among the various sectors we studied than among the Nordic countries in trade unions' strategies towards transnational cooperation. As regards national differences, we did not find any strong or systematic effects associated with whether a country is a member of the EU, or in the Eurozone, or not. However, one country seems to stand out a bit from the others, namely Iceland, whose unions exhibit somewhat lower transnational cooperation with non-Nordic European countries as compared to Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden.

As regards sectoral differences in union cooperation, certain outcomes may be connected to the theory of sectoral regimes. The biggest differences are consistently between on the one hand the two services sectors (banking and financial services, and healthcare), and on the other hand, the three productive/transformational and distributive sectors (metals, construction, and transportation). Not entirely unexpected, we find the nationally anchored healthcare sector at one pole, and the international and competitive metal sector at the other. The key differences are as follows: the production sectors (including construction) have more bilateral contacts extending far beyond the Nordic countries as compared to the services sectors, particularly the healthcare sector. They also display more advanced forms of cooperation in both the Nordic and European arenas, such as training of union representatives, coordination of collective bargaining, and organizing demonstrations. That difference is confirmed by the fact that quite many unions in the healthcare sector contend that it requires too many resources to cooperate on the European arena to really be worth the effort. Still, as stated earlier, these differences should not be over-exaggerated, since there are also similarities in approaches and strategies across sectors. Both the existence of such sectoral differences and a common base of similarities are consistent with previous studies (Furåker & Bengtsson 2013; Larsson 2012, 2014, 2015; Larsson et al. 2012).

It is also evident from the analysis that the application of network- and organization-theoretical approaches on cooperation is fruitful – even if used only in a “soft” (quality-ative) form, as in this report. The resources possessed by the cooperating organizations

have major implications for their cooperation, as do the networks that they develop and maintain. An important aspect of the Nordic trade unions' coordination and strength is that they have established formal and staffed Nordic meta-organizations at both the sectoral and cross-sectoral levels. Together with the shared cultural and institutional context, this lays a firm foundation for trusting relationships among trade unions in the Nordic countries (cf. Hyman 2001): Firstly, this is what makes it possible to coordinate national strategies on the basis of the communication, coordination, and cooperation networks that exist among Nordic trade unions. Secondly, this also makes it possible for Nordic trade unions both to lobby directly at EU institutions – without the “detour” via the ETUFs – and to develop a coordinated approach to issues addressed by the ETUFs.

Indirectly, the resource issue is also evident when obstacles to cooperation with other countries are discussed: It is obvious cooperation cannot grow strong if only one party has the financial, human, linguistic, and cultural resources – as well as the internal legitimacy – for such cooperation. Most notably, this is shown in the Nordic trade unions' relationships with their counterparts in the Baltic States, where the efforts and investments have not lived up to the ambitions and hopes.

Finally, we want to make a short comment about the social dialogues. In all sectors covered in this study, there is ongoing social dialogue, but it is apparent that the interviewees would have preferred stronger outcomes than they have seen today. There is apparent dissatisfaction concerning both the Commission's lack of initiative and the disinterest from employer organizations (Magnusson & Murhem 2015). In addition, a certain frustration exists over the lack of stronger cooperation and coordination on the trade union side, which is problematic from the point of view of legitimacy for social dialogue. The directive on sharps injuries in the healthcare sector is possibly the exception that confirms the rule, but behind the directive was years of negotiation and preparation – and even in that sector, there are union representatives who are not fully satisfied with the outcome of social dialogue.

With President Jean-Claude Juncker at its helm, the European Commission in 2015 stated its objective to relaunch and strengthen European social dialogue (Welz 2015). At the time of this writing, nothing substantial seems to have come out of this relaunch, but there is still hope among trade unions that this initiative will revitalize dialogues on both

the sectoral and cross-sectoral levels. Against the background of Juncker's ambition to breathe new life into the European social dialogue, the ETUC and the three European employer organizations (CEEP, UEAPME, and Business Europe) signed a joint declaration in which they particularly stressed how the standing of the social partners at EU level must be safeguarded.³ But it may also be noted that the parties to this declaration, just like the trade union representatives in our study, emphasize that a prerequisite for successful social dialogue is that it be results-oriented.

³ The "Declaration on a New Start for a Strong Social Dialogue" was signed in January 2016, and can be downloaded here: [http://www.spcr.cz/images/EU/2016-03-16_tss - declaration on social dialogue.pdf](http://www.spcr.cz/images/EU/2016-03-16_tss_-_declaration_on_social_dialogue.pdf)

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